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UNCLAS HANOI 000651

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: "MASS" PEACE RALLIES IN HANOI

REF: A. HANOI 409 B. HANOI 396 C. HCMC 157

1. (U) Similar to the pro-peace meeting they organized on February 18 in Hanoi (ref b), the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), the Vietnam Peace Committee, the Committee for Asian-African-Latin American Solidarity and Cooperation, and the Vietnam-Iraq Friendship Society jointly sponsored another anti-war protest in Hanoi on March 15. According to official press accounts, between 2,000-5,000 people from all walks of life attended, including busloads of schoolchildren as well as representatives of religious groups, workers, intellectuals, etc. The protest was notable mostly for its location: outdoors in the Indira Gandhi Park adjacent to the downtown Hoan Kiem Lake.

2. (U) Organizers formally referred to this occasion a "meeting" rather than a rally or demonstration. In true Communist style, even this outdoor gathering "passed a resolution" opposing military action by the U.S., the UK, and other "warlike forces" and calling for "political measures" in order to avoid "additional hardships" for the Iraqi people. VFF chief Pham The Duyet, a former CPV Politburo member, called for the UN and all "responsible governments" to do everything in their power in accordance with international law, as well as in the "common interests of peace-loving peoples," to protect the independence and sovereignty of all nations, including Iraq.

3. (U) Separately, the Vietnam Women's Union, another mass organization under the VFF, held a rally also on March 15 similarly to express its hope for peace, its opposition to war, and its "complete sympathy" with the women and people of Iraq. The representatives called on all parties to "prevent war in time" and to find "fair political measures" for the Iraqi problem consistent with the UN Charter and international law.

4. (U) Comment: These mass gatherings may lack the spontaneity or non-official nature of anti-war protests elsewhere in the world (which have been reported extensively in the state media here), but do reflect a carefully cultivated popular suspicion of US motives and a deep aversion to US-led military action against Iraq. More official and semi-official protests and rallies can be expected if military action against Iraq begins (with or without UN Security Council approval). The GVN and CPV may even go so far as to orchestrate protests at or near US diplomatic facilities. Nonetheless, Embassy continues to believe that GVN public security forces will ensure that any protests do not threaten our facilities or personnel.
PORTER